

THE REAL HENRY FORD.

Not An Orthodox Believer
According To Church Views

Ford's Religious Ideas Somewhat Vague—Believes, or Once Did Believe, in Reincarnation—Practical Things More to Him Than Nebulous Theories.

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for five years head of the Ford Wel-
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CHAPTER IX.

Henry Ford and the Church.

I once preached a sermon for Henry Ford's special benefit. I told him I was going to do so, and asked him to be present and hear it. He came. He listened very attentively. He went away. It was a good sermon, if I do say it myself, but so far as I was ever able to see it never faded him. It came about in this way:

Mr. and Mrs. Ford were members of my parish. I was building a new church, a gothic structure, that was costing considerable money. The building had been under way for some time and Mr. Ford had made no contribution toward the cost of its construction. This somewhat nettled certain of my parish. "What is the matter with your friend, Mr. Ford, that he does not help us out on this matter? Every one is giving up to the limit, and he, the richest man in the parish, has done nothing." This question and statement of fact were put to me a good many times.

Finally two members of my vestry, against my advice, decided to call on Mr. Ford and solicit a subscription to the building fund. They

went, spent a pleasant evening with him, talked for the most part about almost everything but the one thing they went to him to talk about, because he steered the conversation, and came away, as I have stated in another chapter, empty handed.

One of the gentlemen who interviewed Mr. Ford on this occasion was himself a man of wealth and very generous toward his church. After telling me of what took place at the interview, he launched into a severe criticism of Mr. Ford. "You say that Henry Ford is wanting in generosity," I said to him. "Well, do you know that there are people in this city who say the same thing of you?"

"How can they say that?" he said, evidently somewhat nettled. "You know that I have given thousands, tens of thousands to my church and its institutions."

"I know that," I replied, "and that is just the point people make against you. You give to it, but in the opinion of the public you are giving relatively little or nothing to anything else."

"But it's my money, isn't it? Am I not at liberty to give it away as I deem best?" If I want to give it all to the church, whose business it is but my own?" was the reply.

"Why, then, criticize Henry Ford?" I replied. "For claiming exactly the same privilege when he comes to giving his money away? He is giving millions to his employees. You give to your church. He does not believe in your way of doing things."

and you do not believe in his method. Personally, I think the world needs both of you, that both are doing a service to humanity, and I am not going to allow either of you to criticize the other in my presence without a protest."

A short time afterward Mr. Ford referred to the visit which he had made from the two members of my vestry. "I don't believe in building big and costly churches for the rich," he said, in explaining his refusal to contribute toward the erection of the building then under way. "The amount of money you are putting into this one church edifice would provide for a half-dozen settlement houses which, if properly placed, would do a great deal more good."

It was then that I told him that if he would come to church the next Sunday, and give me a chance to talk to him when he could not talk back, I would tell him why I thought the centers of worship should be as beautiful and costly as men could make them. He said he would come. And he did.

The Sermons. "There is a man in this city," so the sermon ran, in part, "who has done a very unusual thing. You know that powerhouses are built as a rule, in the rear of factories. Often they are just dark, dusty, greasy holes in the ground, with mountains of coal piled outside, and thought is given to their appearance. The power plant is put in a squat building, often in a rear of the lot. But the man to whom I refer has done differently. He has built the costliest and most beautiful powerhouse in America. He has put it on the avenue along with the office buildings. He has tiled the windows with plate-glass. He has tiled the floors. Outside and that building is rubbed, scrubbed, washed and polished."

"I can imagine people criticizing this man for the things he has done. Why spend so much money on a building which is to shelter nothing but the boilers and engines of a plant? Something far less costly would have answered the purpose. Instead of engines and flywheels, which do nothing but go round and round, why did he not put some of his wonderful automatic machines, which do something, out in front, where people could see them, and relegate the power plant to the rear?"

"The answer is, men spend money on the things they love and value. The buildings we erect are symbols of our pride in and affection for the things inside. What a man thinks of his home is revealed in the kind of house he builds around it. What a man thinks of his business is shown in the buildings he erected to house it. This man I have in mind was born with a love for mechanical things. The power that makes them go is a thing which, to him, is worthy of a shelter as costly and as beautiful as he can afford to make it. The energy that throbs through the great factory he knows comes from the powerhouse, where the ponderous flywheels turn in comparative silence. The powerhouse is back of it all—that is why he made it the costly, beautiful thing it is."

"And that is why I am going to put all the money I can get into this church. It is the spiritual powerhouse back of all the fine things men are doing in the way of service. It stands for that which should be symbolized in costly and beautiful ways. And in that way men, who understand it and love it, will be glad to see it housed."

Some time later, on an Easter morning, a check was placed on the plate designated for the building

fund. I never credited it to the sermon and individual was worth more. But when it came to a building for the social activities of the parish, it was different. "That's a good thing," Mr. Ford said to me, "I want to give to that." And he voluntarily gave liberally to it. He came back to the subject of this work at a later time and insisted on making a second contribution which was larger than I felt it wise to accept. It doesn't often happen, but I have known churches to be destroyed by the generosity of a few rich people. I wanted to avoid that.

Mrs. Ford does much through the regular channels of the church and charity organizations. To her personal interest and wise guidance the Ford Hospital owes more than the public will ever know. To her generosity the Williams House, a church institution and a temporary home for borderline girls, owes its establishment. There are many who could speak as recipients of her private and beautiful as men could make them. He said he would come. And he did.

Through the mails countless appeals for help come to her. And conscientiously and with a woman's sympathy she meets them. She has through these letters herself. Numerous cases she has turned over to me for investigation through my department. The thing of it is that so many proved to be undeserving. Great was the surprise and consternation of people to find that their letters had touched the sympathy which they had hoped to arouse, but that that sympathy proposed to act intelligently. If it seemed to merit investigation, it was turned down by Mrs. Ford.

There is a woman on a farm in Arkansas, for example, who must be still wondering at the reach of the Ford Motor Company, because an inquiry in answer to her pitiful appeal to Mrs. Ford. And she must still experience some embarrassment when she recalls how widely her real condition, as the investigator found it, was differed from her description of it in her letter to Mrs. Ford. She was well to do, but Arkansas seemed such a long way from Dearborn that she thought she could take a chance on getting something without her case being looked into.

Mrs. Ford's Kindness. The personal attention which Mrs. Ford gives to these cases is but an index of the gentleness, the kindness and sympathy that are in her, as well as of the thorough and intelligent manner in which she does her work. But to return to Mr. Ford and the church. Frequently the questions asked, "Is he a churchman?" "Is he a Christian?" "What are his religious views?" "Is he a religious man?"

These seem to be the same question put in a little different form, but they are not. The information sought in each case is far from the same. Each question reveals, all unconsciously, a peculiar religious "slant" in the mind of the person asking it.

If it is to the one who asks the first question you state the fact that Mr. Ford was baptized and confirmed in the Episcopal Church, he is quite satisfied. He has gotten all the information concerning Mr. Ford's religion he wants. He belongs to a church. Then he is all right.

The man who asks the second question is not, so I have discovered, particularly interested in Mr. Ford's church affiliations. What he wants to know is something about the individual moral standards of Mr. Ford, and the character of his private life. When you tell him that Mr. Ford's private life is clean, his tastes are simple, his pleasures are wholesome, and that he loves and enjoys his home, you have told him what he wants to know.

The man who asks the third question is just burning up to know if Mr. Ford is a Theosophist, a Spiritualist, or a New Thinker. Does he believe in transmigration of the soul or in reincarnation? What does he think of Confucius and Buddha? Would it be possible to have a talk with him on the esoteric teachings of the ancient mystics, or the doctrine of the Stoics? Inasmuch as he entertains some very original ideas on everything under the sun concerning which he speaks, he must have some very original and interesting views on religion. For the satisfaction of this man permit me to say that Mr. Ford believes, or did once believe, in reincarnation. I have never gone into the subject with him, so I do not know to what extent the belief has taken hold of him. I have heard him say that he has a knowledge of some things with which it seems to him he was born. It comes to him as out of the experience of a former life.

The last question is meant to draw out a statement as to Henry Ford's ideals, his social theories, his doctrines of human relations, particularly his idea of industrial relations. It comes as a rule from a man who places the emphasis on social rather than individual righteousness, who is interested in the fruits of religion and there throughout these pages, so that I need not restate it here.

To sum it all up, Henry Ford is intelligent, in the sense that he attends any church with regularity, enters into its worship, sacramental or other, is interested in the extension of its work, and contributes toward its support in a manner commensurate with his means. His father was a vestryman in the little Episcopal Church in Dearborn. It was in this church that Mr. Ford was baptized and confirmed.

As a churchman, and confirmed in early life, he has not maintained a close contact with organized religion in later years. I was well to do, but Arkansas seemed such a long way from Dearborn that she thought she could take a chance on getting something without her case being looked into.

He is not an orthodox believer according to the standards of any church that happen to know. His religious ideas, as he states them, are somewhat vague. But there is in him something bigger than his ideas, something of a practical nature that is far better than his nebulous theories.

Tomorrow's chapter: Henry Ford, Dives, Lazarus and others.

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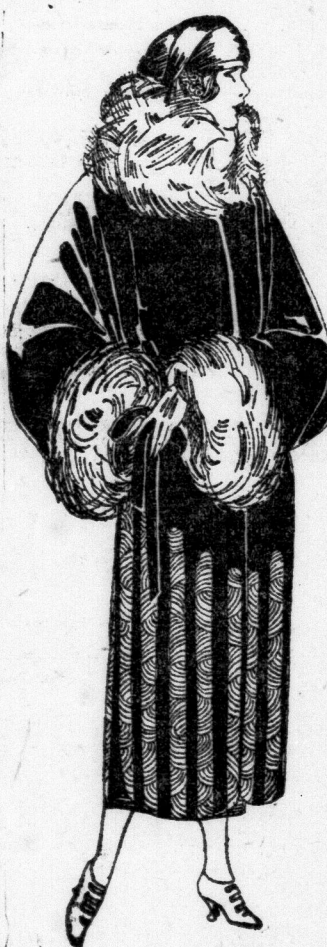
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